UNGA 73 Ministerial side event on:

**Protecting Cultural Heritage: Staying committed to the implementation of UN legal instruments**

26 September 2018, 08:00 - 09:45 am

CR-5

United Nations Headquarters, New York

**Programme:**

**Introductory remarks:**

- H.E. Mr. Nikos Christodoulides, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Cyprus
- H.E. Mr. Manlio Di Stefano, Undersecretary of State, Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation of Italy

**Interventions:**

- H.E. Mr. Yuri Fedotov, Under Secretary-General, Director General of UNODC
- High-level Representative of UNESCO
High-level Representative of INTERPOL

Ministerial / High-level Representatives of the Member States of the Group of Friends

Interventions from the Floor.

Delegations wishing to take the floor are requested to contact the Mission of Italy (Luigi.marini@esteri.it), specifying the level of the speaker.

In order to be admitted to CR5, all Participants should provide their name through the registration form no later than Thursday 20 September, cob.

An ID should be exhibited at the entrance of the United Nations Head Quarters.

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Summary:
In April 2018, following the initiative of Cyprus and Italy, a “Group of Friends for the Protection of Cultural Heritage” was established in the context of the United Nations in New York.

The Group of Friends, which already enjoys the support of more than twenty countries from all regional groups¹, is open to the wider UN membership, based on the common belief that the cultural heritage is the bedrock of civilization, a testament to human identity, history and prosperity. The Group of Friends aspires to serve as a platform that could revitalize international interest, by raising awareness, encouraging implementation of the existing legal framework, sharing best practices and strengthening synergies. By adopting a multifaceted approach toward protecting cultural heritage, it will support all existing resolutions and

¹ The Republic of Armenia, The Kingdom of Cambodia, The Republic of Cyprus (co-chair), The Arab Republic of Egypt, France, Georgia, Germany, Greece, Hungary, India, Iraq, Italy (co-chair), Peru, Portugal, The State of Qatar, The Republic of Korea, Russian Federation, Spain, Turkey, USA (United States Mission to the UN), Socialist Republic of Viet Nam, The Republic of Yemen.
initiatives underway at the UN, as well as organizations that actively deal with cultural heritage protection.

The forthcoming Ministerial Meeting of the Group of Friends, to which all Member States are welcome, intends to provide an informal space for cooperation and exchange of ideas. It is also worth noting that the Ministerial Meeting’s value will be enhanced by the participation of leading organizations in the field.

**Objectives of the Ministerial Meeting:**

- Launch officially the Group of Friends for the Protection of Cultural Heritage
- Extend an invitation to the wider UN membership to join the Group
- Present the expected achievements and main activities
- Reiterate the commitment of international community to the goal of protecting the shared cultural heritage
- Initiate constructive dialogue and exchange of ideas in the context of protection cultural heritage in order to identify shared operational advancements
- Identify issues that Member States would like the Group of Friends to focus on in the future.

**Background information:**

The right of access to and the enjoyment of cultural heritage is a human right guaranteed by international law and the attack to any item of cultural property and any expression of intangible heritage constitutes a blow against the shared cultural heritage of humankind. Unfortunately, these fundamental values have been challenged over the years, with detrimental and irreversible consequences. Despite coordinated efforts, the frequency and scale of acts that damage or destroy cultural heritage in different forms remain alarming. In particular, systematic illegal excavations and looting of cultural heritage and trafficking in cultural property are beneficial to criminal groups and in many cases result in financing terrorist groups.

The international community, together with UNESCO, UNODC, INTERPOL, UNIDROIT, WCO and ICC has taken significant steps to ensure the protection of
cultural heritage and respect for cultural rights. The 1954 Hague Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict and its two Protocols of 1954 and 1999; the 1970 Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property; the 1972 Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage and all the numerous resolution issued by UNESCO later on; the 1995 UNIDROIT Convention on Stolen or Illegally Exported Cultural Objects have contributed to the development of the legal framework. Another important tool of the international community is the adoption of a new Convention by the Council of Europe in April 2017, during the Cyprus Chairmanship, which criminalizes offences related to cultural heritage. Finally, in March 2017, at the initiative of France and Italy the UNSC adopted Resolution 2347 (2017) devoted to enhance the protection of cultural heritage in situation of conflict and to tackle all forms of trafficking in cultural property that could directly or indirectly benefit terrorist and criminal groups.

The Group of Friends aims at enhancing recent efforts, including relevant legal instruments, to combat the destruction and trafficking of cultural property mostly, but not exclusively, in the context of armed conflicts, notably by terrorist groups and organized crime. Of equal importance is the protection of cultural heritage during times of peace, facing intentional or incidental destruction of cultural property and heritage, and in case of natural disasters.

Finally, having in mind that the effective implementation of the existing legal framework depends on public awareness and political will, as well as on coordinated action at different levels, the Group aims at achieving ongoing dialogue between Member States, relevant agencies and stakeholders and local communities.